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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the literature helps bring greater clarity to educators concerning the theory and practice of literature-based instruction. There are two common threads in all the interpretations of literature-based instruction: (1) the use of literature as the primary material for reading instruction; and (2) the elimination of the structural support and practices of basal reading systems. Information which provides a theoretical base for literature-based reading instruction focuses largely on the whole language philosophy, psycholinguistics, and cognitive psychology. Children become literate, according to the advocates, by being immersed in a literate environment and by being encouraged and supported in encounters with literacy. Studies can be identified to support the trend toward instruction with whole texts and purposeful reading. Proponents of the literature-based instruction movement value whole stories and an emphasis on meaning. Reports indicate that the use of children's literature in the teaching of reading has a positive effect on student's achievement and attitudes toward reading. There is a need for more research on literature-based reading programs and implementation strategies. There appears to be a label, "literature-based instruction," which provides an umbrella for a myriad of practices. As models are developed, implemented and evaluated, studies should be undertaken so that teachers can receive guidance in using literature to develop proficient readers. (Seventy-one references are attached.) (MG)

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LITERATURE BASED READING INSTRUCTION:

A WHOLE LANGUAGE PERSPECTIVE

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This paper reviews the literature relative to literature-based reading instruction. A whole language/psycholinguistic foundation for literature-based reading instruction is presented and organizing strategies for instruction are discussed.

LITERATURE-BASED READING INSTRUCTION:

A WHOLE LANGUAGE PERSPECTIVE

Literature-based reading instruction involves the use of literature as opposed to textbooks in the teaching of reading. Proponents of literature based reading instruction suggest that reading programs utilize various combinations of teacher and student interactions along with the selection and use of literature in a manner that will allow students to develop as thoughtful, proficient readers (Hancock and Hill, 1987; Hiebert and Colt, 1989; Tunnell and Jacobs, 1989; Zarillo, 1989). Literature based reading instruction is currently the topic of much discussion in the field of education. This paper presents an analysis of the literature in the area of literature-based reading instruction. The study seeks to bring greater clarity to educators concerning the theory and practice of literature-based reading instruction.

The movement toward literature based reading instruction has been promoted by educators with a whole language perspective toward literacy development (Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987; Goodman, 1986; Newman, 1985; Smith, 1971). The whole language philosophy is based on the assumption that instruction should keep language whole and involve children in using it purposefully and functionally. Kenneth Goodman, (1986), a leading advocate of this philosophy, states that teachers should put aside the carefully sequenced basal readers and encourage students to read for information, for enjoyment, and to cope with the world around them.

Research and literature with a holistic perspective of the reading process began to emerge during the 1960's and 1970's. Prior to that time, as research by Guthrie (1980) shows, reading was conceptualized primarily as an accumulation of discrete skills and was thought to begin with knowledge of individual words. Most research in reading was directed toward word recognition.

Within the context of the whole language perspective toward reading and literacy, however, there

is considerable interest in the psycholinguistic experiences of learners. Reading is seen as a natural process which is part of the process of language development as a whole; it is viewed as beginning with the reader's experience and predictions about meaning. Instead of focusing on skill development and the understanding of exact textual meaning, comprehending passages and relating textual information to personal experience and prior knowledge are primary objectives. Goodman (1973, p. 31) describes reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game in which readers "select the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time." He emphasizes that readers bring to the reading act their accumulated experiences, language development, and thought in order to anticipate meanings in printed material. Other researchers support Goodman's analysis of reading (Levin and Kaplan, 1970; Smith 1971; Cooper and Petrosky, 1976).

Along with psycholinguistic understandings, models of reading with a holistic perspective have strong foundations in cognitive psychology. Proponents of cognitivist theory believe that language development is

dependent on cognition. They propose that children develop knowledge of the world generally and then map this knowledge onto language systems. Thinking is a necessary prerequisite to and concomitant for reading at any level and for any purpose. Any teaching aimed at intellectual development will simultaneously promote language development. Cognitivists argue that children develop language through their activities. The early language of children as well as their development overall is related to actions, objects, and events they have experienced in their environments (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969).

Researchers who have studied the cognitive processes of readers state that in the act of reading, readers are able to understand story structure, draw inferences from passages, and utilize their own background knowledge with text material in searching for meaning. They propose that true reading begins with the reader's search for knowledge and meaning. Individual words on a page are recognized only to facilitate understanding (Ryan and Semmuel, 1979; Raven and Salver, 1970; Stauffer, 1971).

Smith (1988) sheds further light on this position

when he explains that children learn to read as they learn to speak, by generating and testing hypotheses about reading materials and getting appropriate feedback. In addition, he points out that although reading cannot be taught, children can be given opportunities to learn to read. First they need to have people read to them, and then they need the chance to read for themselves with assistance as needed. Teaching a sequential set of subskills to be integrated into the reading process is quite different from merely establishing conditions that will allow students to learn to read.

Ideas from cognitive psychology and linguistics lay the underpinnings for the whole language view of reading. The literature suggests that reading and reading instruction should be informal, natural and, to a large extent, controlled by the desires, needs, and motives of the learner. Instead of beginning with fragments of language, such as letters and sounds, complete forms of written language such as stories, poems, and signs should be used in the development of literacy. Children should be invited to experiment and to do the best they can in reading. They should be

encouraged to determine for themselves whether or not what they read makes sense.

Studies of Good Readers

Advocates of literature based reading instruction believe that the methods of reading instruction used in the classroom should be those which help children to adopt the reading behaviors of good readers (Lamme, 1989). Studies and observations have identified some of the characteristics of good readers. They seem to support a literature based approach to reading.

Hickman (1977) studied the reading behavior of two "extraordinarily literate people in attempting to answer the question "What do fluent readers do?" Her answer was that fluent readers read books and passages of their own choosing for their own purposes with a critical eye. Fluent readers, she concluded, do not read simply to be reading, but for a reason. Rasiniki's (1988) observations support Hickman's findings. Interest, purpose and choice are important in the behavior of good readers. "By observing children doing things that emanate from their own interests," Rasiniki states "we can get a glimpse of the power and potential that is hidden within each

child" (p. 397).

An ethnographic study revealed that first graders in high and low reading groups have different concepts about reading (Bondy, 1985). According to the study, children in high reading groups think reading is a way of learning, a private pleasure, and social activity. In contrast, children in the low reading groups think reading is saying words correctly, doing school work, and a source of status.

Reading instruction with a holistic perspective also draws on research related to readers who learned to read at home without school instruction. Durkin's 1961 study is perhaps the most authoritative study of this type. It concluded that children are able to learn to read without deliberate assistance from adults. Durkin studied 49 natural readers and reported that these children acquired reading abilities through experiences with whole texts provided by strong reading models. Clark (1976) and Thorndike (1973) give strong support to Durkin's conclusions.

Hoskisson (1979) suggests that natural readers solve the problem of learning to read as they construct their knowledge of written language. Hearing written

language is essential to testing personal hypothesis about written language. Parents and other caregivers set the stage for natural reading development when they read to young children and when they provide children with a rich literary environment.

Overall, the literature indicates that children who have learned to read before going to school or those who rapidly learn to read once they begin school, have been read to from earliest childhood. These children have knowledge of how extended written language functions. They have developed a sense of story structure and can follow plots and character development. They know that they can obtain information and enjoyment from reading (Newman, 1985; Goodman, 1986). In terms of technique, good readers read for meaning and self-correct when they make a mistake that does not make sense. Also, they reread favorite books and thereby develop fluency (Lamme, 1989).

Advocates of literature based reading instruction believe that the strategies teachers use in teaching reading should be similar to those used in literate homes. The school should provide a series of daily

activities involving books and expose children to a variety of literature and other reading materials. Teacher's should read to children every day so that children will develop a love for books as well as important concepts about reading. Learning to read naturally begins when parents read to young children and let them handle books, and that process should be continued or initiated with teachers reading aloud and including books naturally in the classroom.

From the perspective of literature based instruction proponents, all children in school should be involved in reading and literature. Children should be read stories and encouraged to select their favorite ones for rereading. Their participation in reading activities should be encouraged and nurtured. The focus of a reading program should be to help children figure out for themselves how written language works (Newman, 1985). Hoskisson (1979) suggests that no formal hierarchy of reading skills should be imposed on children since only a child can determine what can be assimilated and accommodated within his or her own personal cognitive structure. Smith (p. 179) maintains further that reading can never be separated from the

purposes, prior knowledge and feelings of the person engaged in the activity or from the nature of the text being read. Children learn continuously through engagements in reading that make sense to them.

Criticism of Basal Readers

Definitions of literature based reading instruction point out that real books and literature should be used in reading instruction. The use of literature is consistent with holistic understandings which maintain that instruction should not begin with fragmented language or language constructed for instructional purposes. Instruction should employ complete forms of language such as stories, poems and informational material. Though basal readers are the most widely used resource material in the United States for teaching reading, their use is not considered consistent with the whole language perspective toward reading development.

One major problem cited is that the basal reading guides, which most teachers use, often have lessons that emphasize isolated aspects of language and lead learners to put value on fragments of language such as letter-sound correspondence. Further, guides tend to

discourage students from taking risks by introducing arbitrary sequences of skills (Goodman, 1986). Advocates of literature based reading instruction also believe that basal readers often create artificial language passages and mar the use of literature by gearing it to skill development.

Newman (1985) has pointed to assumptions which she maintains underlie basal reading programs, assumptions which conflict with what is understood from a psycholinguistic viewpoint about how language develops. One assumption is that the vocabulary and syntax of beginning reading material must be rigorously controlled and simplified. This practice, she argues is questionable because while that what children say may seem simple, their language environment is complex. Children hear a full range of words and syntactic structures and from this language environment select and reconstruct those elements which they need to communicate meaning. Therefore, to be substantive, the language available to children should be whole both in meaning and in structure.

A second assumption is that accuracy in identifying words is important. Attention given to

vocabulary words and word identification skills imply that unless students identify all the words in reading passage correctly, they will not be able to understand the material. This emphasis can lead many teachers to insist upon accurate word identification without helping children to focus sufficiently on meaning. Moreover, close attention to the surface features of words and word parts, according to Newman, is at odds with what is understood holistically about children's intuitions concerning how language functions.

Research lends some support to the criticism of basals. There are studies which indicate that children who are exposed only to basal reading programs tend to have negative ideas of what reading is all about. Cairney (1988) reported that children's perceptions of the purpose of basal reading activities indicate a focus on materials and procedures rather than on meaning. Many of the perceptions of children studied seem based upon dysfunctional notions about literacy. They did not see meaning as important when reading basal readers nor did they find basal reading material intrinsically interesting. It was found also that the children placed great emphasis upon decoding,

vocabulary, and accuracy. Cairney's study supports the observation of Johns and Ellis (1976) that only a few children in their study felt reading is concerned with a search for meaning. Sixty-four percent of the answers in response to the questions "What is reading?" were concerned with classroom procedures or educational value; twenty-five percent reflected a word recognition, decoding emphasis; eleven percent indicated a meaning emphasis.

Eckhoff (1983) found that children who read only the abbreviated language of basal readers tended to write short choppy sentences. Children who saw more natural, syntactically mature language in their reading materials wrote more sophisticated sentences. This study is significant since reading and writing are mutually reinforcing processes in language learning.

The authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) directed their criticisms of basal teaching toward two frequently accompanying practices: ability grouping and the lack of independent reading time. In his review of the research on ability grouping in basal reading settings, Unsworth (1984) concluded that homogeneous grouping is not effective for improving

reading achievement levels. The disparity between good and poor readers increases as students spend time in reading groups that remain inflexible from year to year. Hiebert's (1983) review of studies showed differences in the teaching of high and low reading groups. Low ability groups spend more time on decoding tasks and oral reading than do high reading groups. Teachers spend more time dealing with behavior management with low achieving reading. Teachers also communicate to these students the negative status of the reading group. Becoming a Nation of Readers encouraged educators to find alternatives to ability grouping.

The absence of independent reading is another concern often associated with basal reading programs. After the basal reading activities, often there is little time remaining for independent and individualized reading. The 1984 National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that only 10 percent of fourth grade students had read a novel for school (Lapointe, 1986). Goodlad (1984) found that reliance on basal and other commercial materials led to a predominance of skill-related lessons. He concluded

that the state of reading instruction in the classes observed was dismal. Apart from the practice of oral round robin reading "reading occupied about 6 percent of class time at the elementary level." (p. 106). It appears that in many basal reading programs, reading books from the library seems often to be viewed as an activity to be done only after all other assignments are completed or during special periods such as Sustained Silent Reading.

By and large, basal programs are structured programs requiring the intervention of teachers using sequenced instruction. The teachers control the learning, to a large extent, by direct instruction, skills exercises, and comprehension questions. There is growing interest in alternative approaches to basal reading instruction because some educators see limitations in isolating sounds, letters, and words from the language system for skills practice. There is also concern about the vocabulary and syntax control of basal programs which tends to cause a loss of style. Such rigidity, it is maintained make language less natural and less predictable. Holistic literature-based instruction is based on the idea that at all

levels of instruction more complete forms of written language should be used and that the primary focus of instruction should be on helping students to construct meaning from their encounters with print.

The Value of Literature in Reading Instruction

Generally, children's books have greater richness of vocabulary, sentence structure, and literary form than basal readers. They also have more plot complications, more character development, and conflict than basals. Holistic literature-based classrooms should be rich in a variety of books and print. In these classrooms, there should be little use of materials written specifically to teach reading (Edelsky and Flores, P. 145; Koeller, 1981). As Fielding, Wilson and Anderson (1984) note, natural texts support reading as a meaning related activity.

Basals have relied on readability formulas to edit or choose the content of reading texts. Studies by Eldredge and Butterfield (1984, 1986) concluded that it is unnecessary to rely on formulas. According to their research, in which second grade children chose reading material from a classroom library, sixty-two percent of the books chosen had average readability scores above

the fourth grade level. Yet, the children read, enjoyed, and comprehended the books without apparent difficulty. Consistent with Eldredge and Butterfield's work, Newman (1985) points out that readers must reply on prior knowledge in order to make sense of print.

All children have a wealth of knowledge gleaned from experiences. This knowledge is an essential resource for reading and learning to read. The materials chosen for reading should be written in the kind of language children have come to expect of books. With these materials children are able to use what they know about language, story structure, and content to understand print and construct meaning.

Proponents of literature-based reading instruction point to the meaningful and challenging activities provided for children in their programs. They claim that in such programs children spend a great deal of time reading. Moreover, rather than struggling with the skills tasks of the basal programs, children write stories, act in plays, discuss books, and use artistic media to respond to literature (Glazer, 1981: Huck, Helpler and Hickman, 1987; Durkin 1978-79; Goodman, 1986).

Children's trade books should be the cornerstone of a reading program, holistic literacy proponents argue. There is much value in exposing children to the natural language writers of children's books use. Such language is not characterized by the rigidly controlled vocabularies and simplified syntax found in basal readers. The illustrations provide support for the text. Moreover, stories from children's literature have something relevant to say about children's lives. As Lukens (1990) states real literature for any age is words chosen with skill and artistry to give the readers pleasure and to help them understand themselves and others" (p. 10).

It is important that teachers be knowledgeable of strategies for teaching reading with a literature base. A number of patterns or strategies has been reported (Zarrillo, 1988, 1989; Hiebert and Colt, 1989). Not all approaches with literature of necessity imply a holistic approach to reading instruction. Teachers who wish to implement a literature based reading program in a whole language, psycholinguistic mode will need to select strategies and activities which allow children opportunities to develop as readers who are concerned

with constructing meaning from written texts and who can accommodate and relate written information to their own prior knowledge.

Zarrillo (1989) reported three main approaches for implementing a literature based reading program. These include (1) individualized reading with self-selection and self-pacing, (2) literature units, and (3) core books. His findings are based on an analysis of classroom practices by teachers who identified their reading programs as literature based. Each of these organizing approaches has been described in the literature.

The essential characteristics of the individualized reading approached include: (1) self-selection of materials by students for their own instruction, (2) self-pacing by students as they read materials, (3) individual conferences between the student and the teachers, and (4) groups assigned for reasons other than ability or proficiency in reading. It is to be noted, however, that there are many variations of the individualized reading approach, all of which are not literature based. A complete discussion of the individualized reading approach is

given by Veatch (1959, 1978).

Coody and Nelson (1982), Glazer (1981), Glazer and Williams (1979), Huck and Hickman (1976), and Moss (1984) have defined the literature unit orientation. The unit is considered to be a small set of books related by some literary element such as style, a theme, or setting. The entire class or special group reads or listens to the literature in a literature unit. Students participate in a variety of response activities related to the readings. These may include discussion, writing, drama and artistic expression. Self-selection can be a feature of this approach if students choose materials included in the unit.

Core literature refers to selections which have been identified as important for close reading and intensive consideration in the classroom. The literature should be viewed not only as significant in content, but also as a stimulus for writing and discussion (Alexander, 1987). Teachers may use a variety of sources for teaching ideas for core books. However, as Zarrillo (1989) points out teachers who are most effective use core books as springboards for independent reading and writing; others may simply

substitute core books for textbooks.

The three orientations to literature based reading instruction discussed above should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Teachers have developed programs that have features of each orientation. Strickland and Cullinam (1986), Hill (1983), and Hancock and Hill (1987) have described classrooms which employ combinations of individualized reading, literature units, and core literature.

Hiebert and Colt (1989) report the following three distinct patterns of literature based reading instruction: (1) teacher-led instruction with teacher selected literature (2) teacher and student-led interaction with teacher and student selection of literature, (3) independent application and student selected literature. These researchers assert that when teachers focus only on independent reading of student selected material, they fail to consider the guidance that students require for becoming expert readers. On the other hand, a focus on teacher-led instruction fails to develop the independent reading strategies needed for lifelong learning. Thus, a total reading program should consist of various combinations

of teacher and student interaction and selection of literature so that children develop as thoughtful proficient readers.

Discussion

Literature based reading instruction means different things to different people. This is evident in the varied definitions and practices discussed in the literature. There are, however, two common threads in all the interpretations: (1) the use of literature as the primary material for reading instruction, and (2) the elimination of the structural support and practices of basal reading systems.

Information which provides a theoretical base for literature based reading instruction focuses largely on the whole language philosophy, psycholinguistics, and cognitive psychology. The ideas present are logical and substantive. Children become literate, according to advocates, by being immersed in a literate environment and by being encouraged and supported in encounters with literacy. As an integral aspect of literacy, reading ability develops as children are supported in meaningful engagement with print and whole texts, and as they are nurtured in an environment that

values literacy. Studies can be identified to support the trend towards instruction with whole texts and purposeful reading.

The literature centered movement is critical of basal reading and the subskills emphases often fostered by basal programs. Proponents of the literature based instruction movement value whole stories and an emphasis on meaning. Accordingly, activities such as readalongs, assisted reading, and shared book experiences are primary methods of having students learn to read. However, it is necessary to ask if the research which supports skills instruction can be ignored. For example, there is strong support for early intensive instruction in phonic analysis to help students develop independence in decoding (Calfee and Drum, 1986; Trachenburg, 1990). Further, it is necessary to question if it is possible to combine a selected use of skills instruction in a complementary manner with a literature based approach. There is evidence that some educators are endorsing such attempts when experience and teacher judgement indicate that particular students might benefit from such instruction. (Trachenberg, 1990; Samuels, 1988;

Winagrade and Greenlee, 1986; Heymsfed, 1989).

Overall, there is a growing emphasis on using literature for reading instruction. Reports seem to indicate that the use of children's literature in the teaching of reading has a positive effect on students' achievement and attitudes toward reading. The majority of the published articles on literature based reading programs are anecdotal reports of class and school programs. These are interesting and inspire educators to focus more on literature in the classroom. Educators are further encouraged by the rationale for a literature based reading program which is rooted in holistic philosophy. As pointed out by Zarrillo (1988), however, the reports on literature based reading instruction for the most part, lack adequate research designs, background information on students, and detailed descriptions of curriculum and teaching methodology.

Literature based reading instruction offers great promise for instruction in reading. However, there is need for more research on literature based reading programs and how they can be implemented. At this point, there appears to be a label "literature based

reading instruction" which provides an umbrella for a myriad of practices. As models are developed, implemented and evaluated, studies should be made so that teachers can receive guidance in using literature to develop proficient readers.

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